

## **Home Composting**

Home composting is the most environmentally friendly way of dealing with kitchen and garden waste, plus it produces compost that can be used as an excellent soil improver.

Composting is useful in all gardens. Only in the very smallest gardens will it be difficult to find space for a compost heap and material to fill it. Owners of such small plots could consider worm composting instead via a wormery.

Although councils offer green waste collections, the RHS encourages home composting because it does not involve heavy transport, with its associated environmental costs.

### **When to compost**

Composting is done all year, as and when suitable materials are generated in the garden or home. However late summer to early winter is the peak time for making compost.

### **How to compost**

#### **- *The site and container***

It is important that the site is not subjected to extremes of temperature and moisture, as the micro-organisms (bacteria and fungi) that convert the waste to compost work best in constant conditions. Position the bin in light shade or shade; it is often more convenient to use a shady area of the garden.

An earth base allows drainage and access to soil organisms, but if you have to compost on a hard surface, then add a spadeful of soil to the compost bin.

Bins retain some warmth and moisture and make better compost more quickly, but even an open heap (not enclosed in a bin) will compost eventually. Any of the compost bins on the market should produce compost as long as they exclude rain, retain some warmth, allow drainage and let in air.

Bins less than 1 cubic m (1.3 cubic yd) in size are much less effective than larger ones.

### - ***Getting the right balance of composting materials***

Aim for between 25 and 50 percent soft green materials (e.g. grass clippings, annual weeds, vegetable kitchen waste, or manure) to feed the micro-organisms

The remainder should be woody brown material (e.g. prunings, wood chippings, paper, cardboard, straw or dead leaves, soiled chicken litter nb not other pet contaminated bedding)

The bacteria and micro-organisms that produce the compost function best when the balance of green and brown materials is correct.

Avoid letting any one individual material dominate the heap - especially grass clippings, as these can become a slimy, smelly mess on their own.

Kitchen waste and grass clippings are best mixed with brown woody material, as they tend to be wet and easily compacted, excluding air.

### - ***Some common composting materials***

**Green:** Grass clippings; soft, leafy plants including annual weeds [not seeding], fruit and vegetables, uncooked kitchen waste; selected pet waste/bedding.

**Brown:** tree and shrub prunings and hedge trimmings (ideally shredded), woodchip, leaves, paper and card (torn up or shredded), straw, plant stems.

**Accelerators and activators:** Products such as 'Garotta' are sometimes added where green waste is in short supply. They contain high levels of nitrogen (a nutrient found in green waste) but should not be necessary if green waste is plentiful. It is also possible to purchase activators containing carbon (a nutrient found in brown woody waste); these are aimed at composting grass clippings or other green waste where there is insufficient brown waste

**Lime:** People sometimes think you need to add lime to the compost heap, but there is no need to do so.

### - ***Turning the heap***

Turning the heap adds air; air is necessary for composting to occur. If the heap is too wet or becomes compacted, then the composting process is slower as less air is available.

Ideally, place a lot of composting materials on the heap in one go, and turn it periodically (perhaps every month) to introduce air. Failure to turn the heap is probably the main cause of poor results.

Many gardeners are unable to fill the heap in one go, as they accumulate waste gradually. Because of this, home-made compost is seldom as perfect as municipal compost, but it is still effective.

Remember to keep the heap moist in dry weather – turning will give you an opportunity to assess the moisture level.

### - ***When is the compost ready?***

Garden compost can take between six months and two years to reach maturity. Mature compost will be dark brown, with a crumbly soil-like texture and a smell resembling damp woodland.

It is unlikely that all the material in the heap will be like this, but any remaining un-rotted material can be added to the next batch of composting materials.

### - ***Problems***

Sometimes the results of composting are not as expected.

**Wet, slimy and strong-smelling compost:** Too little air and too much water are often to blame. Cover the heap to protect against rain and add more brown waste, such as chopped woody material, shredded woodchip, straw or paper.

**Dry and fibrous with little rotting:** Usually caused by too little moisture and too much brown material. Add more green waste, or try a commercial activator or accelerator such as 'Garotta'. Alternatively, add fresh manure at one bucket for every 15cm (6in) layer of compost, fish, blood and bone fertiliser at 270g (9oz) per 15cm (6in) layer of compost, or sulphate of ammonia fertiliser at 140g (5oz) per 15cm (6in) layer of compost.

**Flies:** Well-run compost bins don't produce swarms of flies, but if you do see these, then make sure you cover kitchen waste with garden waste after adding it to the heap and check that moisture levels are not too high, causing insufficient air in the heap.

... and from **'Garden Buildings Direct'**

### **Some Simple do's and don'ts of creating your own garden compost**

Compost is brilliant for the environment and a great way to find use for leftover food. But do you know the do's and don'ts when it comes to getting started?

So here is some advice and clever tips on how to create a purposeful, nutrient-rich garden compost heap. It's a great planet-friendly way to deal with kitchen waste, but there are a few important things to remember when making one of your own.

'Keen gardeners and environmentally conscious homeowners across the country can cut down on waste and boost the nutrient intake of their plants by making their own compost,' say Garden Buildings Direct. 'But the perfect compost recipe can be difficult to achieve if the ingredients aren't right or easy to avoid mistakes are made.

So we've put together a list of four do's and four don'ts to help Brits make the most of their garden compost heaps.'

#### **DO**

1. Use as much fruit and vegetable as possible

Putting a range of nutritious leftovers into the pile will help provide all the goodness plants will need when it comes to using your compost.

2. Remember non-food items

Items such as grass clippings, leaves, dead plants and flowers will work really well in a compost heap.

3. Moisture your pile by regularly adding water

Do remember to try to keep it damp and not soggy. You don't want it too wet.

4. Turn your compost heap regularly

You can use a garden fork to help you do this. It will allow sufficient aeration and keep your compost heap healthy.

## **DON'T**

### 1. Use any animal products

Stay clear of meat, fish or dairy products on your compost heap as they don't decompose easily. Although we are advised to put cooked food waste in our green bins, this is because the high temperatures reached in large scale commercial operations, such temperatures are not achieved with home composting.

### 2. Leave it uncovered

Wild animals, cats or other items can find their way inside if you leave it in the open. It's always best to cover your compost heap with a secure lid.

### 3. Try not to compact your compost

If you have any items that may be taking up too much room, break it up with a garden fork. Packing too much in will restrict the air flow.

### 4. Don't add any pet faeces to your compost

These are full of nasty bacteria that could end up harming your compost.